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June 23, 2021

The Honorable Cecilia Aguiar-Curry
Chair, Assembly Committee on Local Government
Capitol Office, Room 5144
P.O. Box 942849, Sacramento, CA 94249

Re: SUPPORT-- SB 552 (Hertzberg) Drought Resilient Communities Act (As Amended on June 21, 2021)

Dear Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry:

We write in support of the Drought Resilient Communities Act (SB 552), which will help ensure small and rural communities are better prepared for the next drought. Specifically, the bill would improve local planning, increase data collection, update emergency responses, and improve statewide coordination. Most notably, the bill includes:

- Require small water systems to develop and maintain at their facilities an abridged Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP).
- Require the State Water Board to conduct an assessment of minimum drought resiliency measures across small water systems, such as securing backup water supplies and well monitoring.
- Require counties to establish a standing drought and water shortage task force or substantially similar alternative process.
- Requires counties to update their groundwater well application to ask if the new application is due to a dry well or a well that is actively failing due to drought or water shortage.
- Require additional coordination and communication of critical drought data between counties, state agencies, and Groundwater Sustainability Agencies.

These tools are critical for communities most at risk and will help prevent catastrophic water shortages for areas most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Under California law, small water suppliers and rural communities are often not covered by established water shortage requirements. Recognizing this significant gap in drought resiliency planning, the legislature passed SB 606 (Hertzberg, 2018) and AB 1668 (Friedman, 2018). Conjunctively, the bills required the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to propose to the Governor and the Legislature, by January 1, 2020, recommendations and guidance regarding the development and implementation of countywide drought and water shortage contingency plans to address drought planning for small water suppliers and rural communities. To fulfill this legislative requirement, DWR created the County Drought Advisory Group (CDAG), which consisted of State agencies, cities, counties, small communities, small water suppliers, and other stakeholders, and had many discussions on the best way to improve the preparation of small communities for the next drought. This report, due for release this spring, provides important guidance for small community drought preparation.

With the drought worsening across the entirety of the Western United States, and several reports of domestic wells already going dry, the urgency of this bill has increased significantly. Without planning in place for small and rural communities, hundreds of thousands of people are at risk of going without water to meet their basic household and drinking water needs. This directly threatens California's ability to secure the Human Right to Water for all. We are currently seeing daily reports of dry wells throughout the state. Therefore, we must have proper drought resiliency planning to protect basic access to water.

We can do better as a state and take the lessons learned to prevent what happened during the last drought from happening again. The Drought Resilient Communities Act represents a historic

effort to avoid catastrophic impacts on drinking water for areas most vulnerable to climate change. For these reasons, we strongly support and urge your AYE vote on SB 552.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Clary, California Director
Clean Water Action

Jonathan Nelson, Policy Director
Community Water Center

Michael Claiborne, Directing Attorney
Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Erin Rodriguez, CA Policy Advocate
Union of Concerned Scientists

Melissa Romero, Legislative Affairs Manager
California League of Conservation Voters

Sergio Carranza, Executive Director
Pueblo Unido CDC

Torri Estrada, Executive Director and Policy Director
Carbon Cycle Institute

Pat Bakalian, California Coordinator
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

Samuel Molina, California State Director
Mi Familia Vota

Danielle Dolan, Water Program Director
Local Government Commission

Arnold Sowell Jr., Executive Director
NextGen California

Sherry Anne Lear, Organizer
350 South Bay Los Angeles

Nikita Koraddi, CA Legislative Advocate
Natural Resources Defense Council

Jonas Minton, Senior Water Policy Advisor
Planning and Conservation League

Betsy Reifsnider, Sacramento Policy Associate
Mono Lake Committee

Chione Flegal, Managing Director
PolicyLink

Susan Harvey, President
North County Watch